



UNITED STATES COAST GUARD

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

MARINE SAFETY ALERT

Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety, Security and Stewardship

September 19, 2008
Washington, DC

Alert 7-08

DANGER ALOFT

The U.S. Coast Guard **strongly encourages** that operators of vessels establish clear written guidelines and procedures for working aloft, require the use of safety harnesses, discourage and prohibit "rites of passage" such as described below. Going aloft to any height on any type of vessel is very serious and dangerous business, can be deadly and leaves no room for acts of daring or joking around!

We're sadly reminded of that fact by the death of an 18 year old crewmember onboard a New England sailing vessel. This tall ship had embarked a group of students and set out for a beautiful day of sailing. About an hour into the cruise a crewmember slipped from the rigging and plummeted about 30 feet to the deck below sustaining terrible injury that resulted in his death.

Evidence in the casualty investigation indicated that this young man went aloft without permission, was unsupervised and alone and was participating in an informal rite of passage referred to in the tall ship community as "laying across the spring stay." This involves crossing from one mast to another while hanging by your hands and feet on a wire called a "spring stay."

The resultant Coast Guard casualty investigation concluded in part that, "The practice of laying across the spring stay is an extremely dangerous and unnecessary evolution, especially while the vessel is underway, and without a safety harness. Although crewmembers were not directed to use the spring stay, it appears the practice was not discouraged and was considered by some crewmembers as a daring accomplishment or rite of passage."

Further, the investigation concluded that:

- The policies regarding crew training for going aloft in the rigging onboard the vessel appeared to be "unstructured and loosely defined" relying primarily upon on-the-job type training with no written guidelines or procedures.
- The crewmember was not wearing any type of safety harness. This piece of safety equipment was neither required by regulation or by company policy and was not onboard the vessel at the time of the casualty.

This safety alert is provided for informational purposes only and does not relieve any domestic or international safety, operational or material requirement. Developed and distributed by the Office of Investigations and Analysis, United States Coast Guard Headquarters, Washington, DC.
